Faith/Devotion

Carol Wilson · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Carol Wilson · 1:02:02

A few years ago, I was visiting an ashram in southern India, an ashram where Ramana Maharshi lived near the sacred mountain Arunachala. There's a big hall there they call the Samadhi—they use the word differently there—it's the place where Ramana is buried. Every evening in the hour before dinner, some men and women from the ashram come and do an hour of chanting, and then everyone goes in for dinner.

At the far end of the hall is the actual samadhi, the marble structure where he's buried. It's customary for people to circumambulate, to walk around the samadhi. You can come in and spend some time doing that every day. During the chanting, people sit against the walls and listen, and from time to time they get up and walk around.

It's interesting to watch, and also to be part of, all the different ways that people walk around that samadhi. There are lots of people there—Indian people, Western people, all different kinds. And you can see, even in yourself, sometimes just walking around casually, not paying attention. Sometimes people are chatting while walking around. You can really get this sense of wanting to get what Ramana had, or wanting to feel the holiness, or wanting something. Some people go and really prostrate themselves in front. You feel the sense of supplication, of needing, or just looking spiritual. The whole range—all the stuff we see ourselves go through.

But one night, and this is the reason I'm bringing this up, there was a man who's the president of the ashram. He's lived there for many years, and every night when everyone goes in to dinner, he and the other male workers serve the food. You sit in lines on the floor with a banana leaf for your plate, and they come around with big buckets of curry and put it on the banana leaves. There's really this sense that they're serving us.

This particular night, the president was doing the chanting. Then the chanting ended, and the bell for dinner rang. He just got up, and I happened to be watching him. So simply and naturally, no big anything, just got up and with great care—but no big anything—walked around, did his three circumambulations of the samadhi, and then went in to serve the dinner.

Somehow it touched me so much. It's still in my mind. Something about attitude, about motivation, about the whole sense of spiritual practice coming from the motivations of faith, of love, of surrender—rather than from the motivation of wanting, needing to know the truth, needing to understand. You know how we can flip back and forth between those.

So I thought tonight I'd talk about another motivation, another aspect of our practice that opens us up to the same truth—because it is the same truth. Shifting from the motivations of wanting or needing to understand, to just touching on faith, and devotion even, and surrender.

What really inspired me watching the president walk around was the total everyday simplicity of faith, of devotion. No big whoop. No "I'm so filled with devotion, let me prostrate myself all the way around the ashram." Just walk around and go serve the dinner, both of those equal.

I could see for myself—it really went into my heart—how often, out of what starts with sincere motivation, my path, whether it's meditation practice or being in an ashram or cooking dinner, can slide into wanting, into either wanting or a kind of spiritual hubris. Trying to magnify my sense of being spiritually not attained, but getting there. At least working on it. At least I try. At least that's what my life is about. It's like wanting the truth, and that's very different from loving the truth.

That's really the shift. And what do I mean by truth? I don't mean some big explanation of something. In terms of our practice here, just the simplicity of awareness in one moment. Not ever, forever, always solid—in one moment. Do I love the truth enough to trust it so much that in this moment of awareness, this is truth revealing itself? Because where else could it be?

It's a real sense of surrender into what's happening right now. That's what awareness is. That's what mindfulness is. The opening into the unknown of whatever this moment is presenting.

And awareness and this moment are not two separate things. It only seems that way from the space of thinking.

This is from the famous Zen master Dogen. He says: "Truth is not far away. It is ever present. It is not something to be attained since not one of your steps leads away from it. When you have thrown off your ideas as to mind and body, the original truth will fully appear. Zen is simply the expression of truth. Therefore, longing and striving are not the true attitudes of Zen. If you cannot find the truth right where you are, where else do you expect to find it?"

Right where we are. Right with whatever's arising, right in this instant.

This quality that speaks of devotion, of faith, of trust—this is what we're practicing here. Moment after moment, we're practicing dying into whatever's arising in this moment. Not with fear, but with trust. Not trust that something we want to happen will happen, not trust in the next thing, not trust in anything in particular. Just so trusting in awareness that we don't need to hold back or hold on or keep constructing things. That sense of me, me, me.

But of course we can't make this happen. That's why it's trust. That's why it's surrender. That's why it's not "do A, B, C, and D, and then you get E." It's really, as somebody said today, radical. Just do your chanting, walk around the samadhi, go serve dinner. Just wake up in the morning, brush your teeth, eat your

breakfast, come in and sit. One thing isn't better or worse or more spiritual or less spiritual than another. Every single moment of any of that, the truth is revealing itself. We surrender into the awareness in that moment.

Byron Katie has a book called *Loving What Is*. I didn't read it; I just liked the name. That's her practice: loving what is. I don't mean by loving something like, "Oh, I'm so glad that my foot hurts today and I'm feeling tired. I just love it." No. Not love in that sense. That's how we love pizza or pie. But love in the sense of surrendering our holding back, surrendering our ideas, our assumptions, our sense of "what does it mean about me"—just the willingness to be totally aware of whatever this moment is, without adding anything extra.

Does that sound familiar? It's only what we've been blabbing about the whole time. But I'm trying to shift the perspective just a little bit.

When we're in a moment like that—you all know—when the trust, the surrender into awareness, just for that moment, holds nothing back, there isn't anything separate. There's no "me" here, an object there. No "this sensation is happening and I'm being aware, I'm surrendering." In that moment, there's nothing separate. It's just the truth manifesting itself.

This poem from Izumi Shikibu:

Watching the moon at dawn,
solitary, mid-sky,
I knew myself completely,
no part left out.

Sharon likes to say that to pay attention is to love. A quality of total presence. The moon at dawn—I knew myself completely, no part left out. The aching foot, the grumpy mind, the hungry stomach, the unpleasant sound. I knew myself completely, no part left out. It doesn't matter what it is that's happening. It's just that, in that moment, that quality of surrender.

This is from Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, a wonderful Tibetan Dzogchen master. All of us—except Andrea—we all went to see him together in Nepal a couple of years before he died. He says: "The present method for becoming quickly accustomed to the unfabricated state of awareness is to have devotion to enlightened beings and compassion to sentient beings."

Devotion and compassion are both love. In the moment of love, the empty nature dawns nakedly. That's the real line I love: in the moment of love, the empty nature dawns nakedly. He says, if in this moment of love, of devotion, of surrender, of trust, of faith—if in this moment you can look inwardly, it is like the sun unobscured by clouds. The nature of emptiness is nakedly manifest. So remember to look inwardly.

I want to talk a little about why and how this works—how the nature of emptiness is nakedly manifest in

the moment of love.

In one of his suttas, the Buddha is talking about the immeasurable deliverance of mind, of which there are, you'll be happy to know, various types. Four of them happen to be the Brahma Viharas. He's talking about these and asking: what do they all share? In some way, all these different immeasurable deliverances are all the same. How? And he says: lust is a maker of measurement, hate is a maker of measurement, delusion is a maker of measurement. In other words—and this is the note from Bhikkhu Bodhi—lust, hate, and delusion may be understood as makers of measurement in that they impose limitations upon the range and depth of the mind.

The way I would put it, the way it looks to me, is that when there's any of those—lust, hate, delusion—the experience, when we look into our mind, when we look into our experience, it is limited. It's constricted. There's self and others, or there's awareness and that, or this thing we like and everything else. The mind is limited. There are senses of separation, and that's how we live so much of our life.

In the moment of love, devotion, look into the mind, and how does he say this? The nature of emptiness is nakedly manifest. There's no measurement in that moment.

Just as with paññā, with wisdom, with insight, as Joseph was talking about last night, there's a moment when—and one of the other ways the Buddha talks about deliverance of mind is through voidness, which is through really having insight into the emptiness of self, of mere mind. So it's on a par, you could say. Equal. When we talk about it through wisdom, really in a moment of insight there's no measurement there.

But sometimes that's not accessible. For some of us at certain times, and for others of us at more times, the path of faith, of devotion, of trust might open up more naturally—at certain times, or in who we are, or just how our mind works. And they work together. So in the moment of love, deep in the Brahma Vihara, in that moment of just surrendering into the truth of this moment, in the moment of just trusting awareness completely—there's no measurement discernible in consciousness, in mind.

We can explore this understanding, or this kind of heartfelt knowing, from these various ways. This is the Buddha, continuing: "In a bhikkhu whose taints are destroyed"—so now we're talking about arhats—"these three makers of measurement are abandoned, cut off at the root, made like a palm stump, done away with, so they are no longer subject to future arising. And of all the kinds of immeasurable deliverance of mind, the unshakable deliverance of mind is pronounced the best."

Now, that unshakable deliverance of mind is empty of lust, empty of hate, empty of delusion. That's the mind of an arhat, unshakable. Nothing's going to shake the measurement back in. But moment to moment, that's not—as Dogen says, that's what we're practicing. Not just putting in our time and hoping somewhere a big light goes off. That's what we're practicing moment to moment: no measurement. I'm not saying it's simple or easy. We know that. We run into the things that make it difficult—our safety nets, our comfort

zones, the places where we say, "Oh, no, not this." How many times have I said, "No, if awakening means this has to go, or I have to be with this, forget it. I don't want any part of that." Notice those little moments when they come up.

But before I go to that, I want to say one more thing about measurement, coming from Joseph's talk last night—something that Mingyur Rinpoche describes in his book. I just love this. He's talking about the felt sense of "me" in a moment. Not the idea, not some concept, but actually when you're sitting here, walking around, brushing your teeth, and you tune in—there's a felt sense of "me," right? You know what I'm talking about.

You don't have a felt sense of me. I'm scratching my face. That's very basic. We all have that, right? Probably. Or you wouldn't be here, because you wouldn't feel like you had a problem.

So Rinpoche says that this felt sense of me is the original measuring point for samsara. He describes how in Tibet, when they want to make the footprint to set the foundation for building a building, they start in the middle with a rope or string. From that middle point, they measure out how far it goes, all the way around in a circle or a square. That middle point is the actual measuring point for building the house.

He says that's how the felt sense of me works. Everything in our experience in terms of measurement is measured from that, just in a moment. It's happening moment by moment, but it's quite interesting to play with. For some reason, this has been popping up in my mind during sittings lately. Just see which measurements you notice.

Measurement of time starts right here, doesn't it? Past, future, five minutes from now, yesterday, how long is this talk going to last—it all starts from here. Measurements of space: there's space all around, but usually the space all starts from here. Measurements of self and object: in a moment of meditating, there's a sense of self and the object, awareness and the object. As long as there's that sense of me, there's that sense of measurement.

And when it drops away—which it often does—people love it. They come in during interviews, or in your own experience: "Wow, it was so nice. There was just no sense of me." It is really nice. "I knew myself completely, no part left out" because she's looking at the moon and totally present, and the measurement drops away. Myself isn't really her. It's just the totality of awareness in this moment. Boom—that. No measurement of past or future. It doesn't mean this about me or you or anything.

So just play with that. Just seeing: referring back to me, referring back to me, that sense of measurement. And even though it's really a burden, it doesn't help us to intellectually hear that or think that. In fact, then there's another thing: "I'm so stupid—I keep adding this burden on top of myself." The times when measurement is gone, there's that sense of "Oh, wow, what's different?" No measurement. That's all. No measurement.

Nature, for many people, is a really inspiring support for that. You know how many awakening poems,

like the one I just read, are set in nature. Many people here, when you're going through a really hard time or you're just a little tense or tight or things are just blah—going outside, even when it's not nice weather, doesn't have to be nice. There's something about being in nature that for many people, just the quietness, just nature itself, the fact that there's no one else around to get the māna, the conceit, the comparing going.

Mostly we don't compare ourselves to trees. To turkeys, I hope not. Turkeys maybe, I don't know. But not to trees, not to the stars, not to the chipmunks. And so sometimes imperceptibly, that felt sense of me isn't being recreated so strongly moment after moment. Sometimes there's just that sense of peace.

That's what it is, actually—nature supports our trusting, our settling into the simplicity of just this. We don't really usually compare this sunset to last night's sunset. I mean, sometimes we do, and then we realize we're missing it. We tend to just—oh, it's like this. Peace. No measurements.

To pay attention is to love, to the simplest of things. That's really how moment-by-moment mindfulness works. We start by learning to use our experience—sensations of breath, sensations in walking, the movements of the arms, noticing the thought, whatever sense object at the six sense doors is arising. We use that to remind us, to trigger awareness. We start with awareness of breath, awareness of this.

But then, when there's that quality of surrender into the awareness, there are those moments when it stops being awareness *of* and it's just the completeness of the moment. Just this. And the simplest things.

can trigger that.

This is a silly example, but I really noticed it the last couple of days. I have this one teacup that I really love. First, you must know, tea—like a pot of tea in the morning—is the high point of my day. I just love to sit and have tea. And I used to have three of these teacups, but two of them have gone the way of all things, and I only have one left now. And it's just perfect somehow. It fits my hand. I just love it.

I know I'm totally attached. When someone stays in my house and I'm away, I hide it so they won't break it. I know all this. I can live with that. I notice it. I know it's going to break. I've gone online. I even found I could buy more, but it's not the same. It's this teacup.

But I've noticed—I wasn't thinking about this talk, but I was just noticing—when I'm washing it every morning, I'm a little more careful. Because how do these things break? You hit it in the sink, you hit something with it in the drainer. So I'm just a little more careful.

But what I noticed the last couple of days, which was lovely, is that it starts, okay sure, it starts from greed. We can't pretend it's a highfalutin motivation. It's like I'm holding on to the cup. But I'm really paying attention. And then it really just stopped being about me and the cup and holding on. It's just the awareness. It's just what it was. Awareness, and these things were happening. And it's not awareness of or that in awareness. It's just: this is it. And the awareness gets much more interesting. And you know what

you're doing. I know I'm brushing the cup. But none of that stuff matters. It doesn't matter.

Anything, anything opens us up to this recognition, this trust in awareness, this love for awareness, really. And when we start loving awareness more than we crave and hate the things that are happening, then trust and faith, devotion, surrender, start happening much more by themselves. And that only deepens our faith, deepens our trust.

So that comes by way of mindfulness. It also comes by way of actually recognizing, cultivating faith itself. At times we need to, and sometimes more than others. Some people's psychological makeup, you could say, is more one way than others. Some people are more wisdom types. Some people think of themselves as more faith types or devotion types. But I just want to say we all need all of it at different times. None of us can just do it in one way, because all the different factors arise in our minds.

I've always thought of myself as a real wisdom type—that what got me into practice was wanting to understand the nature of things, wanting to know the truth, what's going on. But just today, Sharda said to me—she knows me really well, we've known each other for, I don't know, thirty years—she says, "Oh, you're such a devotional type." I said, "Me? Devotional? No way. I'm the least devotional person I know." That's why I'm talking about this. She was shaking her head. Because, you know, we always talk about what we need to learn ourselves, right? You've probably figured that out by now.

So anywhere along our spiritual path, in a retreat like this, but also in our whole life—whether we have a lot of tendency toward devotion and surrender or not, whether wisdom is our way—when it gets blocked, we're all going to run into, and I bet you all have already here, times when...

It's just really challenging.

Not in a way we don't like it, but either our motivation drops out or we hit this place where, like I said before, I just can't go there if that's what it's about.

Sometimes people have mentioned this to me—I won't say any particular story—but it's something I also recognize in myself. There are times when what I find my mind holding onto in a moment is some suffering mental pattern. It's not like I'm holding onto some great idea of something in my life, but some sense of seeing myself in some screwed-up way that's so familiar it feels like a comfortable old blanket or a really nice glove. No, if that has to go, who am I? Who would I be without my complete self-loathing? How can I make it through the world without this?

Never mind when it's something that we actually like. But for all of us, our views, our beliefs, our deepest commitments, all of our ideas about ourselves—not some but all—are going to be challenged. And our views are what we use to try and construct, hopelessly but we never give up, trying to construct some sense of solidity, of order out of the chaos. Knowing what's going to happen. Trying to make ourselves better.

But enlightenment is not a self-improvement project. It's not about making our personalities better, nicer, kinder. Luckily, that happens as a kind of side effect. I mean, if you're getting angrier and meaner and crueler, something isn't working—that's true. But that's not the point. We start out that way. We all do, of course, but it's going to get challenged.

Stephen Batchelor, he's quite a brilliant guy. Not that everyone always agrees with him here, but he's a brilliant guy—he's too smart for me to even know if I agree or not. He says that emptiness is not just an experience of oceanic bliss. It's a falling apart of all of our strategies of self-interest, self-centeredness, and seeming protection. And although it is freeing, it also evokes great disconcertion, great confusion, dis-ease, fear at times—like being in no man's land.

We think we want emptiness, and yeah, we think of oceanic bliss. We don't think of how all of our strategies have to also fall apart to recognize emptiness. Again, only in a moment. Remember how the mind, from the felt sense of me, projects into the future: "Oh, everything has to fall apart forever. How will I function?" Or with oceanic bliss: "When will I get there and have it?" But just in a moment, notice when we're running up against some strategy, some view, some sense of self, some way of being, the way we're practicing our understandings—and somehow the mind goes, "No, not this. I can't do this anymore."

That's when consciously calling on faith, on surrender, on devotion—if that's helpful—compassion, devotion to enlightened beings, can be helpful. As Sayadaw U Pandita says, it could be devotion to Buddha, to Dharma, to Sangha.

One of the definitions or descriptions of saddhā, which is translated as faith, is confidence. Another one, the way U Pandita described it, is willingness to do. It gives us the energy to take another step, if you will, to show up and die into this next moment, whatever it is, to take a breath and go, "Okay, this too," and just open into it.

Without faith, we do just get stuck. "Okay, I can't do it. I'm out of here." Luckily, we all have moments like that. I mean, we really go. We all have moments. "I'm glad I don't have my car keys. Okay, I give myself until after tea time. If it still feels like this, I go home." We all make those bargains. But you're all still here.

So I'm not talking about that as a mental state. I'm talking about when we really run up against something. Without faith, we wouldn't do anything. So just recognizing that faith is really like the ground spring that gives us all the energy to keep going.

In terms of this devotion, in terms of surrender, in terms of faith—it may start externally, kind of dualistically, a little even artificially. Faith in your teachers or in the Buddha or in the teachings that you've heard, or inspiration from another being. Nothing wrong with that. That's what gets us going. That's how it starts.

We all need faith in the face of the unreliability of samsara at times. We all need something to call on just to get us moving. But it's not that the faith makes everything clear and okay. The faith just gives us that

energy to be willing to open again completely into the unknown, to take a step into who knows what. That's the paradox of faith—that it gives us the courage, enormous courage, to just let go, to surrender into who knows what, to trust that the truth is right here, no matter how mundane or boring or really, truly scary "here" is.

Have you ever seen a movie that came out a couple of years ago called *Touching the Void*, about two mountain climbers? I'll tell it quickly. It was a recreation of an actual event that happened fifteen or twenty years ago. Two men were mountain climbing together in Peru, somewhere in the Andes, a very high mountain, out in the middle of nowhere, no other people around. They were roped together, coming down, and they slipped and fell. One of the men fell over the edge of a cliff. He's tied, right? And the other guy is still on the land. And they hang like that—he hangs like that for an hour or so. The one on the land is trying to get him up, and he can't. He's being pulled. He can't get the other guy up. He can't go anywhere. And his choice is either to just get pulled over the edge... Well, he made the other choice. He cut the rope.

So he cut the rope. The guy fell into a huge crevasse. He just saw his friend go, and that was it. As far as he knew, his friend was dead. So he made his way down the mountain to base camp.

The other guy who fell into the crevasse—it's like a big cut in the ice—he fell down deep, broke his leg. His leg was really shattered. And he was stuck in this crevasse. He couldn't get back up. There was nowhere to go. And he said he had a deep, deep, primal terror of these crevasses. So he was in this dark place. His friend was gone. His leg was shattered. And he stayed like that for a day and a night. No water, no food. He realized no one was going to come—this primal terror.

And then he looked, and the only other way to go was... he was on a ledge. There was another opening, and the crevasse went down even deeper and darker, way down to where there was no light at all. He said, you know, he was totally terrified, but he couldn't get up. And he said, this is the question: I have to make a choice. I may be wrong, but I can't just abdicate. I can't just stay here frozen.

So he finally worked up his courage, and basically he lowered himself down as far as he could go with his rope into this other crevasse. Total terror. This is—in a way it's a heavy example—but it's like total surrendering to the unknown. He said, I can't abdicate. I have to make a choice. The other choice is to consciously make the choice to stay here and starve to death. That was his other choice.

So he lowered himself down with no clue. And of course, it turned out that as he went down, he actually hit bottom, and there was a kind of tunnel up that he could actually get up and out. And with his broken leg, he could hardly move, and it took him another couple of days on this shattered leg.

Really, it was unbearable to watch. Every moment, he had to keep making that choice even after he got out—to keep going, to keep going, to keep going over this horrendous landscape. And so obviously he got back. His friend had just burned his clothes, was just about to leave when he arrived.

But that sense of, you know, we're in the worst possible place, in a place where everything's fallen apart,

primal terror—what can I do? Where can I go? It's totally hopeless. I know that's exaggerated, but we have moments in our practice that feel like that. There are moments when we're brought up against ourselves, our patterns, our sense of self, and it can feel at that depth like there's nothing I can do.

And faith is the quality of mind and heart that simply gives us the courage, the confidence, the willingness to act. And here all it is, is: okay, this too. Awareness of this too. Loving the truth in this. That's all. Even if everything I think is me is going to go, there's enough trust to meet this moment. Not knowing where it's going to go. Because if we knew, that's already back in the limitation of the known. That's measurement.

So yes, we need to call on faith, something to help us look outside of the view of reality we've unquestioningly constructed. And sometimes we need someone else to pull us along. That's what's so great about Sangha. That's what's so great, in a way, about just being here and the schedule. Even if you don't follow the schedule exactly, there's not much else to do. And sooner or later—I know you've found things, and I'm sure you've found things we don't know about. Sometimes we don't find out for years, and I won't even tell you some of the stuff we found out. But sooner or later, all that stuff gets old, and you really feel like you're wasting your time, and you go, right, here I am. Step into this void.

There's a story I want to tell about a woman in the time of the Buddha. Somehow we don't want to know. Let me just stay in my own little suffering state and kind of practice, but just within these little limits that I already know, not outside my comfort zone.

Her name was Khema, and she was the wife of a king who was a follower of the Buddha. I mean, kings had lots of wives, and she was incredibly beautiful and very spoiled and devoted to pleasure and beauty. She lived a life of luxury, and the king was always trying to get her to come and hear the Buddha's teaching, but she never wanted to go. She said, "Well, I've heard that this guy talks about renunciation and he's not really big on sense pleasures, and I really don't—I'm not so interested in that. So I don't want to go."

So the king tricked her. The Buddha was teaching in a beautiful pleasure park, so the king hired a singer poet to stroll around and sing a song extolling the beauties of this particular park where the Buddha was teaching, so that Khema would hear it. And when she heard this song, she said, "Oh, well, let me go see this beautiful park," because she couldn't stay away from something new and beautiful.

So she went, and he tricked her because she went and was standing on the outskirts. This is just the opposite of the story I told last time about the poor, miserable wretch who sat on the outside. This is the most beautiful, pleasure-loving queen—Khema, the golden one. But also, when the Buddha looked around with his eye, asking who can hear the Dhamma, it was: "Aha, it's Khema."

And so first, to speak to her mind, he constructed with his magic powers the image of a celestial woman so beautiful, so much more beautiful than Khema. And she saw this and was taken by the beauty. Wow, incredible beauty! And then he had this image just slowly, slowly age and get old and cracked and gray

and flabby and disintegrate and die.

So she was watching all of this—it's like our whole life compressed into three minutes. And she was watching all of this and said, "Wow." It went in. If that can happen to her, that's going to happen to me.

So her mind was open, and the Buddha gave the whole teaching. And she was a rare example of a laywoman who, on hearing the teaching, completely became an arahant all at once. Then, of course, she became a nun. So the king lost out. I don't think he planned on that happening. But he had one or two other women to—you know, I don't think he suffered too much.

She was considered the foremost in wisdom of all the bhikkhunis, of all the nuns, because she was so wise—one of the few examples of a lay person in one stroke becoming an arhat. But basically, up until that moment, it was like, "Don't tell me. I don't want to know. I want to stay in my pleasure palace. I want to stay in my comfort zone," even though she had the capacity to completely awaken. And of course, once she saw things as they were, free of the concepts—boom.

So this is faith. This is confidence. What helps us open to it?

In the suttas, the classic Buddha teaching when they talk about faith, it's always defined as faith in the Buddha, faith in the Dhamma, faith in the Sangha. And that may or may not be what inspires this quality of devotion or confidence in us. It may be something else, and that's fine. For me, it's really the faith in the purity of awareness, in the accessibility of awareness, in the truth of the moment. Sometimes it's the confidence, the inspiration that comes from being with or reflecting on certain teachers I've had or known or read about. Or sometimes it's teaching. Sometimes it's other colleagues or friends. Sometimes it's listening to a yogi, because it's not personal—it's whatever you hear, or someone's manifesting in that moment, just kind of the Dhamma, the purity of awareness or seeing the emptiness, you catch it. Because it's true for all of us.

Faith can be triggered in many different ways when we surrender our preconceptions and open. And it can be really quite simple—it can be expressed very simply.

My favorite example of an expression of the simplicity of faith, of just living from and acting from faith in the suttas, is the example of Ananda, who I'm sure most of you are familiar with—the Buddha's attendant, his cousin. For the last twenty-five years of the Buddha's life, Ananda was his attendant. And Ananda was totally devoted to the Buddha, totally devoted to the Dhamma, and a very hard worker.

He was one of the few really famous bhikkhus that you read about in all the suttas who wasn't an arhat through most of the texts. He was a stream-enterer—he wasn't just a spiritual novice. But in those days, with Kashyapa and Sariputta and Moggallana and Kema and all of these people, he was kind of in junior high school by comparison. But he was renowned for his kindness, for his devotion to the Buddha, and for his memory.

He had such total faith and devotion to the Buddha that when the Buddha—before Ananda became his attendant, he'd already been in the Bhikkhu Sangha for many years—needed a new attendant and was kind of looking around the group of monks, asking if anyone would volunteer, Ananda didn't raise his hand. Ananda didn't offer. And then the Buddha asked him, "Why didn't you volunteer?" And because he had such perfect faith in the Buddha, he said, "The Buddha knows who's going to be the best person to be his attendant. I don't need to volunteer. If I'm the right person, he'll know it. He'll ask me." Such total faith.

So he's kind, he's generous, he's inclusive. He served the Buddha just wholeheartedly for twenty-five years. He asked for some boons, some favors when he agreed to become the attendant. I'm not going to say what they were, but they were all things about setting conditions so that he wouldn't be treated special. That's what the favors he asked were—not "I'll be your attendant if you'll do this for me, if you'll do that for me." They were things so he wouldn't be special. And because he had such a good memory, he requested that if he missed any of the Buddha's suttas or sermons, they would be repeated to him later. Because Ananda's the one—when you read the suttas and they begin "Thus have I heard"—that was Ananda. After the Buddha died, he could remember every talk he'd heard by heart.

So he was that devoted. But his devotion also shows up as this generosity, this inclusion of spirit, where he's always trying to get people access to the Buddha, access to the Dharma. I've been around different spiritual scenes where it works the other way—people want to get into the in-crowd and then it's kind of like, subtly, "No, you've got to protect the teacher, keep people away. We're the in-crowd." Ananda was just the reverse. He was always trying to get people to hear the Dhamma, to get them in. And he was really kind. There are times where people would fall in love with him for his kindness.

There's one story where he was walking by a well in a village, and there was a woman at the well getting water. She was a woman from the untouchable caste, what they call the Dalit caste now. She was at the well, but in that system, they weren't allowed to actually get water for themselves. So she couldn't get water. Ananda walked by, saw what was happening, and said very kindly, "What are you doing? Can I help you?" She said, "I just need water, Venerable Sir." He said, "Oh, of course," got water, gave her water, and walked on.

And she falls in love with Ananda. She follows him back, following him around until finally the Buddha sees what's happening and asks her why. She says, "Because I love Ananda. Let me serve him. Let me take care of him." And the Buddha said, "You know, it's not Ananda you're in love with. It's his kindness." She fell in love with his kindness—really, basically, the pleasant feeling of the kindness, if we want to get down to the nub of it. But that's just one of many examples of how Ananda manifested and lived his holy life.

Devotion. Simplicity—it reminds me of the president just walking around the samadhi and going to serve dinner. That is one simple way of living with faith, of living with devotion. I said it may start seeming really dualistic for us, but I'm talking about how in the moment of love, there's no measurement. For us, it

starts by looking for something to inspire faith, something to inspire this confidence.

Tulku Urgyen again: "In the beginning, you need fabricated devotion because natural, unfabricated devotion or uncontrived compassion does not occur immediately." So we're practicing karuna in a formal way. We need to cultivate, at times, fabricated devotion—calling up faith, calling up "Can I trust? Can I surrender?" That's fine. Because in the moment when the faith, the confidence, the trust really comes, in that moment it's the real thing. It doesn't matter. Like me and my teacup—it starts in a pretty banal way, but when the awareness is there, when the love is there, if you look inside, there's no measurement. Inside what? I don't know. The body, the mind. There's no inside, outside, right? Because there's no measurement, there's no separation. It's just this. Form and formlessness.

Ajahn Sumedho says a really interesting thing. I found this on one retreat we were sitting with him. He said that in his experience—Ajahn Sumedho, you know, he's a Western, an American man who's been an ordained bhikkhu, a teacher in the Ajahn Chah tradition for over thirty years, quite wise and very funny. I think we played a talk of his here, right? Very funny. Well, at this one retreat, he said that in his mind, the biggest hindrance he's seen for Westerners in practice is self-doubt. We tend to doubt—not only our self-hatred, that's one thing—but self-doubt, where we don't have faith, we don't have confidence in our own insights, in our own experience of awareness, in our own potential for liberation, or even our own experiences in a moment of liberation from our patterns, even momentary.

And he says, in part—this is him again—he thinks it's because for many of us in the West, partly culturally also, our personalities are so strong and believable. I actually think it's that we get so caught up in our personalities, we pay so much attention to our personalities. Everyone has personalities, but I've noticed when I've been in Asia for a while, yes, people have personalities, and they're not all lovely, but it just isn't in the forefront of every moment—my personality, my personality, and your personality, and let's process our personalities. When I come back here after being in Asia, honestly, I feel like I'm falling into this culture of which I'm a part, this neurotic obsession with personality.

Okay, that's a little much. He didn't say all that.

That was me.

But he says, here in the West, our personalities are really strong, and we believe them so much that we get really caught back into them. And so then, since for many of us part of our personality is this "I'm no good, I can't be free, that insight wasn't real because if it was real it wouldn't have gone away. If I was really able to be free, then I would never be angry again. If that was really a moment of awareness, then I wouldn't be suffering now. If that was really awareness, then how come these other people are asking so much more intelligent questions and I can't come up with anything?" All that stuff. And we believe it. We believe it.

That's why we need to cultivate a little faith. It doesn't just step outside of the box of personality—you

don't have to fix it, you don't have to talk back to it, you don't have to shut it up. We just don't have to set it up on the throne. The Buddha's there, not our personalities.

So yes, we have to work a little bit maybe at faith. Taking the three refuges, for me, has become a practice from spending a lot of time in Buddhist countries. Refuge in the Buddha, or refuge in the seed of awakening. Refuge in awareness. Refuge in what Dogen said: "The truth is right here, right now. Where else can you find it?" And refuge in the understanding that this is not only true for everyone else—it also includes me. Refuge in the Dhamma, the truth. Refuge in the Sangha.

The real meaning of Sangha, the classical meaning, is actually the Sangha of awakened beings, or the awakened mind stream—just knowing that's possible, inspiring ourselves. If not that, then finding, being in nature. What brings about, again, the sense of mystery, the sense of awe, the sense of stepping outside of our ideas of the possible or what the world even is.

Again, from Arunachala—I often use this image. Arunachala, it's not really a mountain, it's kind of like a big hill, but there's nothing else around so it looks like a mountain. About 3,000 feet high. A friend who had gone up to the top told me that early in the morning, two or three in the morning, there are lots of mountain monkeys up there. There are monkeys down below, which aren't tame, but they'll jump—if you have one speck of food in your hand, they'll jump on you and grab it. They're very different. The mountain monkeys up on the top are much more wild.

And he said they would just get on the edge. It's very rocky, very rocky high, rocks and boulders down below, a few trees and shrubs, not very wooded. And he said these monkeys, they just get on the edge of the mountain, and then they throw themselves off into space. And they always land somewhere—they land on a rock or they grab a bush or somewhere. But just that sense of abandon into the moment. The monkeys of Arunachala.

Can we find that willingness to surrender, to throw ourselves into the moment? It's going to happen anyway. We might as well just relax into it. There's no way to stop it.

From Carlos Castaneda, talking about his sorcerers, he said: "Discipline for sorcerers is the art of facing infinity without flinching—not because they are strong and tough, but because they are filled with awe."

Can we just meet this moment—only this moment, not even each, just this moment—filled with awe? With the possibility of loving awareness rather than hating and wanting and reacting to whatever it is that's arising together with awareness. Wow, awareness is here. How wonderful.

Let's just sit quietly for a minute.

I just want to read the last paragraph of "Ash Wednesday" by T.S. Eliot:

Blessed Sister, Holy Mother, Spirit of the Fountain, Spirit of the Garden, suffer us not to mock ourselves with falsehood.

Teach us to care and not to care. Teach us to sit still even among these rocks, our peace in his will. And even among these rocks, sister, mother, and spirit of the river, spirit of the sea, suffer me not to be separated, and let my cry come unto thee.

The community then joined together in taking the refuges and precepts:

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa
Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā Sambuddhassa

Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Dutiyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dutiyampi Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Dutiyampi Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Tatiyampi Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Tatiyampi Dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi
Tatiyampi Saṅghaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi

Pāṇātipātā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi
Adinnādānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi
Abrahmacariyā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi
Musāvādā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi
Surāmeraya majjapamādaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi
Vikālabhojanā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi
Nacca gīta vādita visūkadassanā mālā gandha vilepana dhāraṇa maṇḍana vibhūsanaṭṭhānā veramaṇī sikkhāpadaṃ samādiyāmi

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